

Harnessing Critical Whiteness Theory to Deconstruct Success Stories in Community Tourism: A Call for Action

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ABSTRACT: *Community-Based Tourism (CBT) is often hailed as an approach which promises economic benefits but also empowerment, cultural preservation, and environmental benefits for marginalized communities. However, this paper critically examines the underlying assumptions of CBT through the lens of Critical Whiteness Theory (CWT). It argues that while CBT initiatives are presented as neutral and universally beneficial, they are frequently embedded with Western, neoliberal values that reinforce whiteness as the invisible norm. This paper deconstructs the ways in which CBT commodifies local cultures, imposes Western environmental practices, and perpetuates economic models that prioritize global capitalist frameworks over indigenous knowledge systems. By exposing these dynamics, the paper advocates for a reimagined approach to CBT that genuinely centers the agency, values, and aspirations of local communities, challenging the hegemony of whiteness and promoting true social justice. The findings call for a radical shift in how CBT projects are conceived and implemented, ensuring that they serve as tools for empowerment rather than perpetuating existing power imbalances*

KEYWORDS: *Community-Based Tourism; Critical Whiteness Theory; Cultural Commodification; Neoliberalism; Environmental Conservation; Social Justice; Indigenous Knowledge; Power Imbalance.*

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I. INTRODUCTION

Community-Based Tourism (CBT) has garnered significant attention as a promising model for fostering sustainable development, particularly in marginalized and rural areas. It is lauded for its potential to deliver economic benefits, preserve cultural heritage, and promote environmental stewardship, all while empowering local communities to take charge of their development trajectories. Proponents of CBT argue that by placing communities at the center of tourism development, this approach offers a more ethical and equitable alternative to traditional forms of tourism that often exploit local resources and people for the benefit of outsiders.

However, beneath this optimistic narrative lies a series of unexamined assumptions that, when scrutinized through the lens of Critical Whiteness Theory (CWT), reveal deep-seated issues related to power, privilege, and cultural hegemony. While CBT projects are often framed as neutral or inherently beneficial, they are frequently imbued with Western, neoliberal values that prioritize economic growth and the commodification of culture. This framing, as highlighted by scholars such as (Mitchell and Ashley 2010), aligns with the broader neoliberal agenda, which equates economic development with progress, often at the expense of local autonomy and cultural integrity.

Critical Whiteness Theory provides a crucial framework for deconstructing these assumptions by making visible the often-invisible forces of whiteness that shape the goals, practices, and outcomes of CBT. Whiteness, as a social construct, operates as an unmarked norm, setting the standards by which all other cultural practices are judged. In the context of CBT, this normativity manifests in the expectation that local communities will conform to Western ideals of development and success, often leading to the commodification of their cultural heritage for the consumption of predominantly white, Western tourists. This process, as argued by scholars like (Frankenberg 1993) and (Leonardo 2002), reinforces the dominance of whiteness by marginalizing alternative ways of knowing and being.

Moreover, the emphasis on cultural preservation within CBT is fraught with contradictions. While these projects aim to protect and celebrate local cultures, they often do so in ways that freeze these cultures in time, presenting them as static and unchanging. This approach reflects a colonial mindset that seeks to control and define non-white cultures in ways that are palatable to Western audiences. As (Harris 1993) has argued, this form of cultural preservation can serve as a mechanism of white supremacy, reducing complex and dynamic cultural practices to mere commodities for tourist consumption.

The environmental conservation aspects of CBT are similarly problematic when viewed through the lens of CWT. Western environmental ideologies, often embedded within CBT initiatives, can overshadow indigenous knowledge systems and practices that have sustained local ecosystems for generations. The promotion of eco-tourism as a solution to environmental degradation, without a deep engagement with local environmental

practices, risks perpetuating a form of ecological imperialism that prioritizes Western approaches over those developed within the community itself (Shome 1996; Bonilla-Silva 2010).

This paper intends to critically examine the assumptions embedded within Community-Based Tourism, drawing on Critical Whiteness Theory to challenge the notion that these projects are inherently beneficial or neutral. By doing so, it seeks to reframe the conversation around CBT, advocating for a more nuanced and culturally responsive approach that genuinely centers the needs, values, and agency of local communities. This involves not only deconstructing the whiteness that permeates these initiatives but also reimagining CBT in ways that resist the perpetuation of systemic inequities and promote true social justice. Through this critique, the paper aims to contribute to a broader understanding of how tourism can be re-envisioned as a tool for empowerment rather than a vehicle for the reinforcement of global power hierarchies.

II. CRITICAL WHITENESS THEORY METHODOLOGICAL BUILDING BLOCK

I will discuss five central tenets: (1) its nature as a social construct, (2) the invisible and oppressive norm of whiteness, (3) the role whiteness plays in institutions, (4) whiteness as a social norm that re-enforces our think and shaping of categories, and finally (5) the transformational power of critical whiteness. The important concept of whiteness as a property (Harris 1993) must be set aside in the current setting.

Central Descriptors of CWT

Critical Whiteness Theory begins with the assertion that "whiteness" is not a natural, biological category, but a (1) social construct. This concept is built upon the CRT idea that race itself is socially constructed (Leonardo 2002; Delgado 2001). In this framework, whiteness is seen as a fluid and contingent identity that is shaped by historical, cultural, and social contexts. It intersects with other aspects of identity, such as class, gender, and nationality, leading to multiple forms of being "white" depending on these factors (Nylund 2006; Apple et al. 2009).

Historically, whiteness has been constructed through legal, social, and cultural practices that defined and reinforced racial boundaries. For example, in the United States, the Naturalization Act of 1790 restricted citizenship to "free white persons;" which played a critical role in legally constructing whiteness as a privileged category. Over time, the boundaries of whiteness have shifted to include various European ethnic groups, such as the Irish and Italians, who were not initially considered white (Ignatiev 1996). This flexibility in defining whiteness demonstrates its social rather than biological basis.

The social construction of whiteness is intimately tied to power. Whiteness functions as a powerful social norm, often operating invisibly to secure the privileges and advantages of those categorized as white. This normativity is maintained by positioning whiteness as the default or standard against which all other racial identities are measured and found lacking (Gillborn 1996). The social construction of whiteness, therefore, involves the continuous reassertion of white dominance through cultural, social, and institutional practices.

One of the most critical and complex aspects of Critical Whiteness Studies (CWS) is the exploration of (2) whiteness as an invisible and oppressive norm. This concept posits that whiteness operates as an unmarked standard within society, shaping social norms, values, and institutions in ways that maintain white supremacy and privilege.

Whiteness is often described as invisible because it is seen as the default or norm, rather than as a specific racial identity. This invisibility is a key mechanism through which whiteness maintains its dominance. When whiteness is unmarked, it becomes the standard against which all other identities are compared, often to their detriment. This process is sometimes referred to as "normativity," where the cultural values, behaviors, and perspectives of white people are assumed to be universal or neutral, while those of non-white people are seen as "other" or deviant (Shome 1996; Dyer 2008).

In educational, political, and social contexts, this normativity means that white perspectives are often centered and privileged without recognition or critique. For instance, in curriculum design, the history and achievements of white people are often foregrounded, while the contributions of people of color are marginalized or framed as supplementary. This centering of whiteness reinforces its invisibility by presenting it as the natural order of things, rather than a specific racial perspective (Gillborn 1996).

Beyond invisibility, whiteness also functions as an oppressive norm. This oppression is subtle and pervasive, embedded in the everyday practices, policies, and discourses that structure society. Whiteness asserts itself not through overt racism, but through the quiet, taken-for-granted privileges that white people enjoy simply by being perceived as the norm. These privileges can include everything from better access to resources and opportunities to the assumption of innocence in social and legal contexts (Frankenberg 1993).

The oppression of whiteness is also maintained through the concept of "colorblindness" or "race-neutrality." These ideologies claim to treat everyone equally regardless of race, but in practice, they often serve to protect and perpetuate white privilege. By refusing to acknowledge racial differences and the specific challenges faced by people of color, colorblindness allows the structures of whiteness to remain unchallenged and

intact. It reinforces the idea that if race is not explicitly mentioned, then it does not matter, which ignores the pervasive effects of systemic racism (Bonilla-Silva 2010).

(3) Social institutions, such as schools, workplaces, and the media, play a crucial role in perpetuating whiteness as an invisible and oppressive norm. These institutions often operate on assumptions of whiteness that go unquestioned. For example, in predominantly white educational institutions, the curriculum may reflect white cultural norms and histories, marginalizing the experiences and perspectives of students of color. This can contribute to a sense of alienation and exclusion among those who do not fit the "norm" (Iverson 2007; Leonardo 2002).

Language and social interaction are fundamentally reflecting (4) social norms through which whiteness is perpetuated and reinforced within society. These mechanisms operate both overtly and subtly to sustain the dominance of whiteness as a social norm, often in ways that are invisible to those who benefit from them. Critical Whiteness Studies (CWS) examines how language, communication patterns, and social practices contribute to the maintenance of white supremacy by embedding the values, perspectives, and privileges associated with whiteness into everyday life. Language is a powerful carrier of cultural norms and values. In societies where whiteness is the dominant racial identity, the language used in public discourse, media, education, and everyday conversation often reflects and reinforces the norms and values of whiteness. This can happen by (i) Standardization of Language, (ii) Coding and Stereotyping (Bonilla-Silva 2010), (iii) Microaggressions (Sue et al. 2007), and (iv) Silencing and Erasure (Apple 2004). Social interactions are another critical site where whiteness is reproduced. These interactions, governed by societal norms and expectations, often reflect the underlying racial dynamics that privilege whiteness. The ways in which people communicate, establish relationships, and navigate social spaces can either challenge or reinforce these dynamics. Social norms around politeness and respectability often reflect white cultural values and expectations. For example, behaviors such as speaking assertively or displaying strong emotions may be perceived negatively when exhibited by people of color, while similar behaviors in white individuals are often seen as confident or passionate. These double standards reinforce the idea that white norms are the standard by which others are judged, maintaining the social order that privileges whiteness (Hooks, 2000). Social networks are often racially homogeneous, particularly in environments dominated by white people. These networks provide access to opportunities, resources, and information that are critical for social and economic mobility. The exclusion of people of color from these networks, whether intentional or unintentional, serves to maintain the privileges associated with whiteness by limiting access to the benefits that come from being connected to influential or resource-rich communities (DiTomaso 2013). Institutions, such as schools, workplaces, and media, play a significant role in shaping social interactions and reinforcing whiteness. For example, in educational settings, the predominance of white teachers and administrators can create an environment where white cultural norms are prioritized, and students of color are pressured to assimilate or risk being marginalized. Similarly, workplace cultures that emphasize "fit" often prioritize characteristics associated with whiteness, such as certain ways of speaking or dressing, which can disadvantage non-white employees (DiAngelo 2018).

Deconstruction and Transformation of Whiteness

Deconstruction of whiteness involves critically examining the ways in which whiteness has been constructed, maintained, and normalized in society. This process is grounded in the poststructuralist tradition, which emphasizes the fluidity of meaning and the instability of seemingly fixed categories. In the context of CWS, deconstruction challenges the perception of whiteness as a monolithic, unchanging identity by revealing its contingent and socially constructed nature (Leonardo 2002). Deconstructing whiteness requires making whiteness visible, particularly in spaces where it has been rendered invisible by its normative status. This involves highlighting the privileges associated with being white and scrutinizing the historical and social processes that have made whiteness the standard against which one measures all other racial identities. In the legal realm, for instance, whiteness has been historically constructed through definitions, such as those that determined who could own property or become a citizen, thereby conferring power and privilege on those deemed white (Harris 1993).

While deconstruction exposes the mechanisms of whiteness, transformation seeks to dismantle and reimagine these structures to foster social justice and equality. Transforming whiteness involves rethinking and redefining white identity in ways that do not rely on the oppression of others. This process is inherently anti-racist, as it requires white individuals and institutions to relinquish the power and privileges associated with whiteness. One approach to transforming whiteness is through the concept of "disrupting whiteness." This involves actively challenging and resisting the behaviors, attitudes, and policies that reinforce white supremacy. For instance, in educational settings, this might mean revising curricula to include diverse perspectives, critically engaging with the history of racism, and creating inclusive environments that validate and support the experiences of students of color (Ladson-Billings, 1998). Transforming whiteness also involves institutional change. Institutions must move beyond symbolic gestures of diversity and inclusion to address the structural inequalities that perpetuate whiteness. This might involve revising hiring practices to ensure representation of people of color in leadership

positions, changing policies that disproportionately disadvantage non-white individuals, and committing to ongoing education and reflection on issues of race and privilege (Iverson 2007).

The process of deconstructing and transforming whiteness is a central objective of CWT, put into practice. This endeavor seeks not only to expose the ways in which whiteness operates as a system of privilege and dominance but also to actively dismantle these structures to create more equitable social relations.

III. COMMUNITY TOURISM AS PROMISE AND CURSE

Tourism is recognized as a tool for economic and social development, particularly in regions that aim to diversify their economies and enhance the socio-economic well-being of their populations (Scheyvens 2002). The economic benefits of tourism are profound, serving as a significant driver of growth, especially in less developed regions where other forms of economic activity may be limited. Tourism can drive economic diversification, providing a source of income additional to traditional sectors such as agriculture or mining (Gowreesunkar et al. 2023; Sharpley and Telfer 2015). This diversification is crucial for enhancing economic resilience, especially in economies that are vulnerable to external shocks.

Benefit Generation

Tourism generates income through direct channels such as accommodation, food services, and tour operations, and indirectly through the demand for local products and services. This economic multiplier effect is significant, as tourism spending stimulates various sectors of the economy, leading to the creation of jobs and business opportunities in the tourism sector but also in connected parts of the value chain, for instance in transportation, retail, and handicrafts (UNWTO 2018). For instance, the influx of tourists increases demand for local agricultural products, crafts, and other goods, thereby benefiting local producers and suppliers (Mitchell and Ashley 2010). The development of infrastructure to support tourism, such as roads, airports, and communication networks, also has spillover benefits for other sectors and the local population (Croes and Rivera 2016).

The World Travel & Tourism Council (WTTC) estimates that tourism contributes 9.1% of global GDP and supports one in ten jobs worldwide (Council 2023). This highlights the sector's role as a major global employer, offering employment opportunities across a broad spectrum of skills and income levels. In many developing countries, tourism is one of the largest employers, particularly for women and young people, thereby playing a key role in poverty reduction and promoting gender equality (UNWTO 2013). The creation of jobs in tourism, from low-skilled positions in hospitality to high-skilled jobs in management and marketing, can significantly reduce unemployment and underemployment, which are often major challenges in less developed regions.

Moreover, tourism can promote social development: it allows cultural exchange and can lead to mutual understanding between visitors and host communities. Benefits extend in form of greater social cohesion and pride to local cultures, which are often showcased as part of the tourism experience (Richards and Hall 2000). However, it is essential to manage tourism development carefully to ensure that it does not lead to cultural commodification or loss of local identity.

In addition to its benefits in the economic and social sphere, tourism can contribute to the overall quality of life (Nyaupane and Timothy 2022) including sustainable management of natural and cultural resources. When revenue is reinvested in conservation, tourism can play a positive role in preserving the environments and heritage sites that attract visitors in the first place (Honey 2008). However, the potential for tourism to degrade these same resources if not managed sustainably cannot be overlooked, making the balance between development and conservation a critical concern.

In addition to its economic impact, tourism promotes social development by fostering a greater appreciation of cultural and historical heritage. Tourism bridges between cultures, and opens up possibilities for intercultural dialogue and mutual understanding. When tourists visit cultural heritage sites, participate in local festivals, or experience traditional crafts and cuisines, they engage in an exchange that deepens their understanding of the host culture while also validating the significance of local traditions (McKercher and Du Cros 2012). This interaction can lead to the revitalization of cultural practices that might otherwise be at risk of fading due to the pressures of globalization. For instance, traditional music, dance, and artisanal crafts often find new audiences and renewed vitality through tourism, as local communities are motivated to preserve and showcase their cultural heritage (Timothy and Boyd 2003).

Tourism also helps preserve local traditions and customs by creating economic incentives for communities to maintain their cultural practices. As globalization leads to increased homogenization of cultures, tourism can serve as a counterbalance by providing financial support and global recognition for cultural diversity (Smith and Robinson 2006). By valuing and promoting local traditions as tourism attractions, communities can resist the pressures to abandon their heritage in favor of more globally dominant cultural practices. Furthermore, tourism encourages community cohesion as residents collaborate to share their culture with visitors and engage in tourism-related community projects, thereby strengthening community identity and pride (Richards and Hall

2000). The involvement of community members in tourism initiatives fosters a sense of ownership and responsibility, which can enhance social solidarity and collective action.

Infrastructure development is another critical benefit of tourism. A growing tourism sector often necessitates the development of infrastructure for mass and individual transport such as roads, airports, and public transportation systems to accommodate the increasing number of visitors. This infrastructure development is not only crucial for the success of the tourism industry but also brings long-term benefits to local residents. Improved transportation networks reduce travel times and increase accessibility, making it easier for residents to reach essential services and for goods to be transported more efficiently. Additionally, enhanced telecommunications infrastructure, driven by the needs of tourists, benefits local communities by improving connectivity, which is vital for economic development in the modern world (Buhalis and Law 2008; Desai and Potter 2014).

Furthermore, the demands of tourism can lead to the preservation and enhancement of public spaces, such as parks, museums, and historical sites, which benefit both tourists and residents. These spaces often become central to community life, providing venues for cultural activities and social interaction, and as such contribute to the overall well-being of the community (Ashworth and Page 2011). Enhanced infrastructure makes a region more accessible, both for further economic development and for essential services such as healthcare and education (Sharpley and Telfer 2008). In regions where infrastructure development might have lagged due to economic constraints, tourism provides a strong justification for investments that otherwise might not occur, thereby facilitating broader economic and social development.

Community Based Tourism as Special Case

Community-Based Tourism (CBT) is tourism that is deeply rooted in the principles of sustainability and community empowerment. It focuses on the active involvement of local communities in the planning, management, and operation of the overall activities, making sure that tourism development aligns with the needs and ambitions of the community. This approach is designed to ensure that tourism contributes positively to the community's social, cultural, and economic fabric, rather than simply serving the interests of external investors or tourists (Giampiccoli and Kalis 2012; Koščak and O'Rourke 2020). By placing the community at the heart of tourism initiatives, CBT fosters a model where local residents have control over the tourism development process, allowing them to preserve their cultural identity, protect their natural resources, and improve their quality of life.

Community-based tourism can also appear as eco-tourism (Stronza and Gordillo 2008). This model of tourism encourages traveling responsibly to natural areas, which promotes environmental conservation and has positive effects on the well-being of the local populace. By focusing on sustainability, CBT not only ensures that tourism has a minimal negative impact on the environment but also that it provides long-term benefits for the host community. The direct involvement of local residents in tourism activities helps in building their capacities and makes sure that the economic benefits of tourism are distributed fairly within the community (Salazar 2012; Smith and Robinson 2006).

CBT also emphasizes the importance of cultural preservation and respect for local traditions. Visitors are offered authentic experiences that highlight the unique cultural practices, languages, and lifestyles of the host communities. This immersive approach not only enriches the visitor's experience but also reinforces the community's pride in their cultural heritage (Zapata et al. 2011). Moreover, CBT often involves the development of local infrastructure and services, such as homestays, guided tours, and community-managed nature reserves, which are operated by community members and provide direct economic benefits to the local population (Ashley and Roe 2002).

One of the primary advantages of CBT is its potential to generate direct economic benefits for local residents. By creating jobs and business opportunities, CBT helps to reduce poverty and stimulate economic activity, particularly in rural and underdeveloped areas where other forms of economic development may be limited (Scheyvens 2002). The financial benefits from tourism activities can be reinvested into projects and services for the community, such as schools, medical or supply infrastructure such as electricity and water, leading to broader social and economic improvements (Mitchell and Ashley 2010). (Tosun 2000) argues that CBT contributes to "economic diversification, additional income, and poverty alleviation in rural areas," providing a sustainable source of income that can help communities become more resilient to economic shocks.

CBT supports the preservation of local cultures and traditions by providing a platform for cultural exchange between visitors and hosts. This exchange can foster mutual respect and understanding, encouraging communities to take pride in their cultural heritage and to see it as a valuable resource rather than a relic of the past (Reid et al. 2004). Through CBT, communities can showcase their cultural practices, from traditional crafts to local festivals, thereby ensuring their continuation and adaptation in the modern world (Richards and Hall 2000). (Blackstock 2005) suggests that "community-based tourism offers a form of development that can maintain and strengthen the identity and cohesion of communities." The emphasis on cultural preservation within CBT helps protect languages, crafts, and traditions that might otherwise be at risk of disappearing, particularly in the face of globalization.

Environmental conservation is a core component of CBT. By promoting responsible tourism, CBT plays a significant role in protecting natural resources, which are often the primary attractions for tourists (Weaver 2011). Communities involved in CBT are typically motivated to maintain their natural environments, as these are directly linked to their livelihoods and the success of their tourism initiatives (Honey 2008). The principles of sustainable tourism are embedded in CBT practices, ensuring that tourism activities do not lead to environmental degradation but rather contribute to conservation efforts (Scheyvens 2002). CBT also raises mindfulness among visitors about the importance of the environment, encouraging them to confine themselves to environmentally conscious behaviors during their stay.

For visitors, CBT provides valuable educational experiences that deepen their understanding of different cultures, ecosystems, and environmental issues. These experiences are often more meaningful and impactful than traditional forms of tourism, as they involve direct interaction with local communities and the natural environment (Zeppel 2006). For the host community, CBT offers opportunities to learn new skills related to tourism, such as foreign languages, hospitality management, and entrepreneurship, which can enhance their economic prospects and overall quality of life (Timothy and Nyaupane 2009). (Timothy 1999) observes that "educational interactions between tourists and residents can lead to increased cultural understanding and can be an empowering experience for local communities." Additionally, the knowledge exchange facilitated by CBT can help local communities adopt new practices that improve their environmental sustainability and economic resilience.

CBT can lead to greater political empowerment for local communities as they engage more actively with governmental and non-governmental organizations to manage tourism activities. This increased engagement not only helps communities to have a stronger voice in regional and national policymaking processes related to tourism and resource management but also enhances their capacity to advocate for their rights and interests (Belsky 1999). By involving community members in decision-making processes, CBT fosters a sense of ownership and responsibility, which can strengthen local governance structures and promote more inclusive and participatory forms of development (Mtapuri and Giampiccoli 2016). (Reid et al. 2004) provide a framework with which one can measure how community-based tourism affects local communities through the provision of jobs and additional income sources, and how they can have a say politically. This empowerment is crucial for ensuring that tourism development aligns with the needs and aspirations of the community, rather than being driven solely by external interests.

A Case in Point

I am using the Baan Rim Klong Homestay project as a reference model (Kampetch and Jitpakdee 2019). The Baan Rim Klong Homestay project has been extensively reported and analyzed. It is a comprehensive initiative designed to leverage community-based tourism as a vehicle for sustainable development, cultural preservation, and environmental stewardship in the Baan Rim Klong community of Samut Songkram, Thailand. At its core, the project aims to strike a balance between the economic benefits of tourism and the need to preserve the community's traditional lifestyle and the natural environment. This delicate balance is crucial for ensuring that the community can thrive in the long term without compromising its cultural identity or ecological integrity.

One of the primary objectives of the Baan Rim Klong Homestay project is the preservation of the community's traditional way of life. The community's singular heritage, encompassing traditional practices, rituals, and crafts, is a vital component of its identity. The project seeks to maintain and promote these cultural elements, integrating them into the tourism experience in a way that both sustains the community's way of life and enriches the visitor experience. By engaging tourists in cultural activities such as making Thai desserts, producing handmade crafts, and participating in traditional ceremonies, the project not only offers an authentic cultural experience but also ensures that the community's intangible cultural heritage is preserved and valued. This cultural exchange is intended to foster mutual respect and understanding between the visitors and the local population, further strengthening the cultural fabric of the community.

Economic empowerment and self-reliance are also central to the project's objectives. The project is designed to build a self-sufficient local economy that can thrive independently of external economic forces. By generating income through community-based tourism, the Baan Rim Klong community aims to reduce its economic vulnerability and enhance the financial well-being of its residents. The project encourages the community to generate income from activities such as handicraft production, traditional food preparation, and guided tours, which not only provide financial benefits but also ensure that these activities are sustainable in the long term. This focus on sustainable income generation is critical to the project's goal of fostering economic resilience and reducing dependency on external aid or volatile economic sectors.

Environmental conservation is another key objective of the Baan Rim Klong Homestay project. The community is situated in an area rich in biodiversity, including mangrove forests and waterways that are integral to the local ecosystem and the community's way of life. The project seeks to protect and conserve these natural resources by integrating tourism in a way that enhances environmental stewardship. Activities such as mangrove planting and other practices mindful of the environment are promoted within the community as well as among

visitors, ensuring that tourism activities do no damage to the environment and contribute to its preservation. Sustainable development informs and guides the project's environmental objectives, accentuating how important it is to protect natural resources for future generations.

The project also emphasizes the importance of community participation and ownership in the development and management of tourism activities. A key objective is to foster a sense of ownership among all community members, making sure that the benefits of tourism are distributed equitably and that the voices of all community members, including marginalized groups, are heard and considered in decision-making processes. This inclusive approach is critical to the project's success, as it ensures that tourism development is aligned with the community's values and needs. The project also aims to build the capacity of community members in areas such as tourism management, hospitality, and cultural interpretation, equipping them with the skills and knowledge necessary to manage tourism activities independently and effectively.

In addition to fostering economic and environmental sustainability, the project aims to strengthen social cohesion within the community. By involving community members in collective activities and shared goals, the project seeks to reinforce the bonds that unite the community. This social cohesion is seen as vital for the community's resilience, enabling it to withstand external pressures and challenges. The project uses tourism to nurture community unity, ensuring that the community remains strong and cohesive in the face of changing circumstances.

The promotion of responsible tourism is also a significant objective of the project. The Baan Rim Klong Homestay project aims to educate visitors about responsible tourism practices, emphasizing the importance of respecting local culture, minimizing environmental impact, and contributing positively to the community. By shaping visitor behavior, the project seeks to create a tourism model that benefits both the community and the visitors, ensuring that tourism development is sustainable and socially responsible. The project also aims to develop a long-term tourism strategy that ensures the longevity of the tourism industry in the community. This includes managing visitor numbers, diversifying tourism offerings, and continuously adapting to changing circumstances without compromising the core values of the community.

The Baan Rim Klong Homestay project, as portrayed in the study, ostensibly highlights the potential of community-based tourism (CBT) to contribute to sustainable development while claiming to safeguard the way of life in local communities. The findings suggest that the project has achieved success in several key areas, including economic resilience, cultural preservation, environmental sustainability, and social cohesion. These outcomes are presented as evidence of the project's effectiveness, offering insights that could inform the implementation of similar CBT initiatives elsewhere.

The study claims that one of the most noteworthy outcomes of the Baan Rim Klong Homestay project is its alleged contribution to the economic resilience of the community. The project is said to have fostered a self-reliant economy within the Baan Rim Klong community, primarily through tourism-related activities. The influx of over 5,000 tourists annually is reported to have provided a steady income stream, which, according to the study, has markedly improved the livelihoods of residents. This economic impact is particularly attributed to the growth of local enterprises, such as handicraft production, traditional food preparation, and homestay operations, which have seemingly thrived due to increased tourist demand.

The project is also portrayed as having demonstrated the importance of diversifying income sources to purportedly ensure economic stability. By engaging in a variety of tourism activities—ranging from cultural experiences like Thai dessert-making to eco-tourism ventures such as firefly sightseeing and mangrove planting—the community is said to have reduced its reliance on any single revenue stream. This diversification is presented as a factor that not only enhances economic security but also purportedly makes the community more resilient to external economic shocks, such as fluctuations in tourist numbers due to global economic downturns or pandemics. Moreover, the project is described as encouraging an inclusive model of economic participation, with the implication that the financial benefits of tourism are distributed across different segments of the community. The study suggests that the project's impact on cultural preservation has been profound. It is claimed that the Baan Rim Klong Homestay has played a crucial role in safeguarding the traditional lifestyle and cultural practices of the community. By integrating these cultural activities into the tourism offerings, the project has purportedly ensured that these practices are not only maintained but also celebrated. Tourists are said to actively engage in learning about the community's customs, such as making traditional Thai desserts, producing handmade crafts, and participating in religious ceremonies like giving alms to monks. These activities are depicted as transforming the community into a living museum, where cultural heritage is not merely preserved but actively practiced and passed on to future generations.

Furthermore, the educational aspect of the project is highlighted as significant. For both visitors and locals, the project is portrayed as a platform for cultural exchange and learning. Tourists are claimed to gain a deeper understanding of the local culture, while community members are exposed to new ideas and perspectives through their interactions with visitors. This exchange is said to foster a sense of pride among the community members in their cultural heritage, reinforcing their commitment to its preservation. Additionally, the project is

credited with providing educational opportunities for the community, particularly in areas such as tourism management, hospitality, and cultural interpretation, which are said to further enhance the community's ability to manage and sustain its tourism activities.

Environmental sustainability is presented as a cornerstone of the Baan Rim Klong Homestay project. The study highlights the project's purported success in promoting environmental conservation through eco-friendly tourism practices. One of the most notable outcomes, according to the study, is the preservation of the local mangrove forests, which are described as playing a crucial role in the region's ecosystem. The project is said to have actively involved tourists in mangrove planting activities, allegedly contributing to the restoration and protection of these vital natural resources. This hands-on approach is also credited with educating visitors about the importance of environmental stewardship.

The project's commitment to environmental sustainability is further exemplified by measures that claim to reduce the environmental impact of tourism. These include promoting the use of sustainable materials in handicraft production and encouraging responsible waste management practices. These initiatives are presented as having helped to minimize the ecological footprint of tourism activities, ostensibly ensuring that the natural beauty and biodiversity of the area are preserved for future generations. The study positions the project's success in this area as a demonstration of CBT's potential to align economic development with environmental conservation, creating a model of tourism that is purportedly sustainable.

The study asserts that the Baan Rim Klong Homestay project has had a significant positive impact on social cohesion within the community. The project is said to have strengthened the bonds among community members by involving them in collective activities and shared goals. This collaborative nature is depicted as fostering a strong sense of unity and solidarity, which the study claims has been critical to the project's success. The community is portrayed as working together to overcome challenges and capitalize on opportunities.

Additionally, the project is credited with empowering marginalized groups within the community by providing them with opportunities to participate in and benefit from tourism activities. For example, women, who are often underrepresented in economic activities, are said to have played a prominent role in the project, particularly in areas such as handicraft production and hospitality management. This inclusivity is presented as having improved the economic situation of these groups and enhanced their social status within the community.

Moreover, the study attributes the project's success to the development of local leadership. The strong leadership within the community is credited with effectively managing the tourism activities and purportedly ensuring that the benefits are equitably distributed. The project is also described as providing opportunities for emerging leaders to develop their skills and take on greater responsibilities, ostensibly ensuring the sustainability of the project in the long term.

IV. DECONSTRUCTING THE CASE

The Baan Rim Klong Homestay project is presented as a model of community-based tourism (CBT) that ostensibly fosters economic development, cultural preservation, environmental stewardship, and social cohesion. However, when deconstructed through the lens of Critical Whiteness Studies (CWS), several underlying dynamics of whiteness and white supremacy become apparent, revealing how these assessments, despite their seemingly positive intent, are deeply embedded in a framework that centers and privileges whiteness. This analysis will critically examine how the logics and outcomes of the project reinforce whiteness as a normative standard and perpetuate systemic inequalities.

The Invisibility and Normativity of Whiteness in Economic Development

The economic benefits of the Baan Rim Klong Homestay project are framed within a neoliberal logic that prioritizes capitalist development, often at the expense of local autonomy and cultural integrity. This framing is rooted in a white supremacist ideology that equates economic growth with progress and civilization, a perspective that has historically been imposed by colonial powers on non-white societies. The project's focus on fostering a "self-sufficient local economy" through tourism-related activities aligns with the neoliberal agenda that has been driven by predominantly white, Western nations. This agenda assumes that integration into the global capitalist economy is the primary path to prosperity, ignoring alternative economic systems that might better align with the community's values and traditions.

Whiteness operates invisibly in this context by positioning these economic strategies as neutral and universally applicable, while in reality, they impose a Western capitalist framework on the community. The emphasis on economic resilience through diversification of income sources, while seemingly beneficial, implicitly suggests that the community must conform to global economic norms dictated by predominantly white, Western countries. This economic model reinforces whiteness by promoting a standard of economic success that privileges Western capitalist ideals over indigenous or alternative economic practices that might be more sustainable or culturally appropriate.

Cultural Preservation as a Mechanism of White Supremacy

The project's emphasis on cultural preservation through tourism is another area where whiteness and white supremacy subtly operate. The framing of the community as a "living museum" where tourists can experience "authentic" cultural practices reduces the community's cultural heritage to a commodity for consumption by predominantly white, Western tourists. This commodification is a hallmark of whiteness, which has historically appropriated and exoticized non-white cultures for the entertainment and enrichment of white audiences, while simultaneously devaluing those cultures when practiced outside the tourist context.

Moreover, the notion that tourism can preserve cultural practices assumes that these practices must be frozen in time to be "authentic," rather than allowing for the natural evolution of culture that would occur without external pressures. This perspective is steeped in a colonial mindset that seeks to control and define the terms of cultural expression for non-white communities, ensuring that their practices remain palatable and marketable to a Western audience. The project's focus on cultural preservation through tourism thus reinforces the power dynamics of whiteness by dictating how and in what form the community's culture should be maintained, often at the expense of the community's agency to define its own cultural trajectory.

Environmental Conservation Framed by White Normativity

The project's approach to environmental conservation through eco-tourism also reflects the influence of whiteness. The promotion of eco-friendly tourism practices and the involvement of tourists in activities like mangrove planting are framed as innovative solutions to environmental degradation. However, this perspective often ignores the indigenous knowledge and practices that the community may have traditionally used to manage and protect their environment. By centering Western environmental practices and frameworks, the project implicitly suggests that the community's existing methods are inadequate or inferior, thus reinforcing the superiority of Western (white) environmental ideologies.

Furthermore, the involvement of tourists in conservation activities can be seen as a form of performative environmentalism that benefits the tourists more than the community. This dynamic mirrors the broader pattern of white saviorism, where white individuals or groups engage in superficial acts of charity or conservation that do more to enhance their own moral standing than to address the root causes of environmental or social issues. The project's environmental objectives, therefore, may inadvertently reinforce the dominance of whiteness by privileging Western environmental practices and the involvement of white tourists over the community's own knowledge and agency.

Social Cohesion as a Tool for Maintaining White Supremacy

The project's emphasis on social cohesion through collective activities and shared goals is framed as a positive outcome, but it is essential to interrogate who defines these goals and whose interests they serve. In many cases, the goals of community-based tourism projects are shaped by external actors, including NGOs, government agencies, and international organizations, which are often led by white individuals or reflect Western priorities. The project's promotion of social cohesion may thus be less about empowering the community and more about ensuring that the community conforms to the expectations and standards set by these external entities, which are deeply rooted in whiteness.

The inclusion of marginalized groups, such as women, in the project's economic activities is often touted as a sign of progress and empowerment. However, this inclusion is frequently framed within a neoliberal feminist perspective that aligns with the broader capitalist agenda, rather than addressing the systemic inequalities that these groups face. This perspective fails to challenge the underlying power structures that perpetuate white supremacy, instead offering a superficial solution that maintains the status quo while providing minimal benefits to marginalized individuals. By co-opting the language of empowerment and inclusion, the project reinforces the dominance of whiteness by perpetuating a system that privileges white, Western definitions of progress and success.

The Role of Language and Representation in Reinforcing Whiteness

Language plays a critical role in how the Baan Rim Klong Homestay project is presented and understood. The project is described using terms such as "sustainable development," "cultural preservation," and "economic resilience," all of which carry connotations of progress and modernity that are deeply rooted in Western (white) discourse. This language frames the project in a way that appeals to Western sensibilities, reinforcing the idea that the community's success is contingent upon its ability to align with Western values and practices.

Furthermore, the project is portrayed as a model for other communities, suggesting that its outcomes are universally desirable and applicable. This framing ignores the specific cultural, historical, and social contexts of other communities, implying that the Western model of development, with its emphasis on tourism, economic growth, and environmental conservation, is the ideal. This universalizing tendency is a key mechanism of whiteness, which seeks to impose its norms and values on diverse populations, often to their detriment.

Overall Assessment

The Baan Rim Klong Homestay project, while presented as a success story of community-based tourism, is deeply embedded in a framework of whiteness that shapes its objectives, practices, and outcomes. The project's emphasis on economic development, cultural preservation, environmental conservation, and social cohesion is framed within a Western, neoliberal context that reinforces the dominance of whiteness. By positioning these goals as neutral and universally applicable, the project perpetuates a system of white supremacy that marginalizes alternative perspectives and practices, ultimately serving the interests of white, Western actors more than the community it purports to benefit.

Through the lens of Critical Whiteness Studies, it becomes clear that the project's purported successes are contingent upon the community's conformity to a model of development that is deeply rooted in whiteness. To truly empower the community and promote sustainable development, it is essential to critically examine and challenge the underlying assumptions and power dynamics that drive such projects, ensuring that they are designed and implemented in ways that genuinely respect and uplift the agency and autonomy of non-white communities.

V. CONCLUSION AND SIX IMPERATIVES FOR IMPROVEMENT

In light of the critical deconstruction provided through the lens of Critical Whiteness Studies (CWS), it is imperative to re-envision future projects to dismantle the underlying structures of whiteness that pervade its design and implementation. The following recommendations seek to promote an anti-racist, decolonized, and culturally resonant approach to community-based tourism (CBT), ensuring that the initiative genuinely centers the agency, knowledge, and aspirations of the local community.

Centering Indigenous Epistemologies and Local Autonomy

Future CBT projects necessitate a radical re-centering of indigenous epistemologies and local autonomy. It is crucial to empower local leadership by fully vesting decision-making authority within the community, thus ensuring that tourism development is not externally imposed but is organically driven by the community's cultural and historical context. External actors, including NGOs and governmental agencies, should reorient their roles from directors to facilitators, providing support only when solicited by the community.

Moreover, the integration of indigenous knowledge systems into the project's framework is essential. This involves prioritizing and valorizing local environmental and cultural practices over Western-centric conservation methods, thereby challenging the hegemonic epistemologies that often frame non-Western knowledge as inferior or obsolete. The project must resist the commodification of culture by allowing the community to determine the terms and extent of cultural sharing with tourists, thus preserving cultural integrity and autonomy.

Challenging the Neoliberal Economic Paradigm

Future projects must critically interrogate and challenge the neoliberal economic paradigm that underpins current CBT models. Instead of conforming to global capitalist norms, CBT projects should explore and implement alternative economic models that are reflective of local values and sustainable practices. This could involve cooperative economics, localized exchange systems, or other non-capitalist modes of economic engagement that reduce dependency on volatile global markets and align with the community's socio-cultural fabric.

Economic justice must be foregrounded by ensuring an equitable distribution of tourism-derived wealth within the community. Transparent mechanisms should be established to redistribute economic gains, with a particular focus on uplifting marginalized groups who have historically been excluded from the benefits of economic development. This approach challenges the white supremacist underpinnings of global capitalism that prioritize profit over people and reinforces local sovereignty.

Reconceptualizing Cultural Preservation and Exchange

Future projects must approach cultural preservation beyond the reductive commodification of culture for tourist consumption. Cultural practices should be allowed to evolve organically, reflecting the community's dynamic realities rather than being fossilized in an "authentic" form that caters to external tastes. This shift involves reconceptualizing cultural preservation not as a static exhibition but as a living, evolving practice that is defined and controlled by the community itself.

Moreover, the CBT projects should promote a model of cultural exchange that is genuinely reciprocal, where both visitors and hosts engage in meaningful, bidirectional learning experiences. This model rejects the colonialist framework of cultural tourism that positions non-white cultures as exotic spectacles for Western consumption, instead fostering an exchange that is grounded in mutual respect and decolonial praxis.

Advancing Anti-Racist Environmentalism

Environmental sustainability efforts within the CBT projects must be oriented to foreground anti-racist environmentalism. This involves recognizing and integrating the community's indigenous environmental stewardship practices into the project's conservation strategies, challenging the dominance of Western environmental paradigms that often marginalize or erase local ecological knowledge. By centering local ecological wisdom, the project can promote environmental practices that are not only sustainable but also culturally congruent.

Such projects must also critically assess the ecological footprint of tourism activities, prioritizing the preservation of the local ecosystem over the demands of the tourism industry. This entails developing tourism practices that are minimally invasive and deeply aligned with the community's environmental ethics, thus ensuring that ecological conservation efforts are both effective and culturally respectful.

Redefining Social Cohesion and Inclusion

Social cohesion within the community should be redefined in a way that honors and uplifts the community's internal diversity, rather than enforcing a homogenized vision of unity. New projects should foster spaces for inclusive dialogue and collective decision-making that respect and incorporate the diverse perspectives within the community. This inclusive approach challenges the imposition of externally defined social norms and promotes a form of cohesion that is rooted in the community's own social and cultural context.

Furthermore, CBT projects must prioritize the empowerment of marginalized voices, particularly those of women and other historically underrepresented groups. This involves not merely offering participation opportunities but ensuring that these groups have the resources, support, and influence necessary to shape the project's outcomes meaningfully. By doing so, the project can contribute to dismantling the internal hierarchies that mirror broader systems of white supremacy and patriarchy.

Deconstructing Language and Representation

The language and discourse surrounding CBT projects must undergo a process of decolonization. New projects should avoid relying on Western-centric terminology that carries implicit biases and instead adopt language that reflects the community's cultural and linguistic context. This involves redefining key concepts such as "development," "sustainability," and "success" in ways that resonate with local values and practices.

Additionally, the universalizing tendencies of Western development models must be explicitly challenged. By promoting a pluralistic approach that values multiple pathways to success, the project can resist the imposition of a singular, Western-defined standard of progress, thereby fostering a more equitable and culturally sensitive model of tourism development.

By adopting these recommendations, future CBT projects can transition from a model that inadvertently reinforces whiteness and systemic inequalities to one that genuinely supports the community's autonomy, cultural integrity, and environmental sustainability. This reimagined approach not only aligns with anti-racist and decolonial principles but also serves as a blueprint for more equitable and just forms of community-based tourism.

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